

vir·tue
-noun

conformity of one's life and
conduct to moral and ethical
principles; uprightness.

Developing our Christian Virtues

“But those who fail to develop in this way are short sighted or blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins.” 2Peter 1:9 (NLT)

Key reading for this series

2Peter 1

Greetings from Peter

1 This letter is from Simon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ.*

I am writing to all of you who share the same precious faith we have, faith given to us by Jesus Christ, our God and Savior, who makes us right with God.

2 May God bless you with his special favor and wonderful peace as you come to know Jesus, our God and Lord, better and better.*

Growing in the Knowledge of God

3 As we know Jesus better, his divine power gives us everything we need for living a godly life. He has called us to receive his own glory and goodness! 4 And by that same mighty power, he has given us all of his rich and wonderful promises. He has promised that you will escape the decadence all around you caused by evil desires and that you will share in his divine nature.

5 So make every effort to apply the benefits of these promises to your life. Then your faith will produce a life of moral excellence. A life of moral excellence leads to knowing God better. 6 Knowing God leads to self-control. Self-control leads to patient endurance, and patient endurance leads to godliness. 7 Godliness leads to love for other Christians, and finally you will grow to have genuine love for everyone. 8 The more you grow like this, the more you will become productive and useful in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But those who fail to develop these virtues are blind or, at least, very shortsighted. They have already forgotten that God has cleansed them from their old life of sin.*

10 So, dear brothers and sisters, work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen. Doing this, you will never stumble or fall away. 11 And God will open wide the gates of heaven for you to enter into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

but they couldn't find anything to criticize. He was faithful and honest and always responsible.

2 Corinthians 7:2 . . . Please open your hearts to us. We have not done wrong to anyone. We have not led anyone astray. We have not taken advantage of anyone.

Titus 2:7-8 . . . You yourself must be an example to them by doing good deeds of every kind. Let everything you do reflect the integrity and seriousness of your teaching. Let your teaching be so correct that it can't be criticized. Then those who want to argue will be ashamed because they won't have anything bad to say about us.

By the way we conduct ourselves and the way we treat others. Our words and actions are to be consistent and above reproach.

Job 27:4-6 . . . My lips will speak no evil, and my tongue will speak no lies. I will never concede that you are right; until I die, I will defend my innocence. I will maintain my innocence without wavering.

My conscience is clear for as long as I live.

Acts 23:1 . . . Gazing intently at the high council, Paul began:

"Brothers, I have always lived before God in all good conscience!"

Acts 24:16 . . . I always try to maintain a clear conscience before God and everyone else.

1 Timothy 1:19 . . . Cling tightly to your faith in Christ, and always keep your conscience clear. For some people have deliberately violated their consciences; as a result, their faith has been shipwrecked.

By keeping our conscience clear before God and others.

FAITH (Eph.1:1-23)

Faith is more than just believing; it is trusting our very lives to what we believe. For example, we can believe that someone can walk across a deep gorge on a tightrope. But are we willing to trust that person to carry us across? Faith says yes. Faith in God says that we are willing to trust God with our very lives. We are willing to follow his guidelines for living as outlined in the Bible because we have the conviction that this will be best for us. We are even willing to endure ridicule and persecution for our faith because we are so sure that what we believe is true and that the Christian life is what is best for us eternally.

"Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian servant and gave her to Abram as a wife. (This happened ten years after Abram first arrived in the land of Canaan.) (Genesis 16:3)

INEFFECTIVE FAITH ATTEMPTS TO ANTICIPATE GOD'S PLAN.

Sarai took matters into her own hands by giving Hagar to Abram. Like Abram she had trouble believing God's promise that was apparently directed specifically toward Abram and Sarai. Out of this lack of faith came a series of problems. This invariably happens when we take over for God, trying to make his promise come true through efforts that are not in line with his specific directions. In this case, time was the greatest test of Abram and Sarai's willingness to let God work in their lives. Sometimes we too must simply wait. When we ask God for something and have to wait, it is a temptation to take matters into our own hands and interfere with God's plans.

“Prove by the way you live that you have really turned from your sins and turned to God.” (Matthew 3:8)

INEFFECTIVE FAITH IS MARKED BY AN UNCHANGED LIFE.

God’s message hasn’t changed since the Old Testament—people will be judged for their unproductive lives. God calls us to be active in our obedience. John compared people who claim they believe in God but don’t live for him to unproductive trees that will be cut down. Just as a fruit tree is expected to bear fruit, God’s people should produce a crop of good deeds. God has no use for people who call themselves Christians but do nothing about it. Like many people in John’s day who were God’s people in name only, we are of no value if we are Christians in name only. If others can’t see our faith in the way we treat them, we may not be God’s people at all. To be productive for God, we must obey his teachings, resist temptation, actively serve and help others, and share our faith. How productive are you for God?

“Then Peter called to him, “Lord, if it’s really you, tell me to come to you by walking on water.”” (Matthew 14:28)

WEAK FAITH TENDS TO LACK ENDURANCE.

Peter was not putting Jesus to the test, something we are told not to do (Matthew 4:7). Instead he was the only one in the boat to react in faith. His impulsive request led him to experience a rather unusual demonstration of God’s power. Peter started to sink because he took his eyes off Jesus and focused on the high waves around him. His faith wavered when he realized what he was doing. We may not walk on water, but we do walk through tough situations. If we focus on the waves of difficult circumstances around us without looking to Jesus for help, we too may despair and sink. To maintain your faith when situations are difficult, keep your eyes on Jesus’ power rather than on your inadequacies.

this with good motives, and I have watched your people offer their gifts willingly and joyously.

Integrity pleases God, for it is godly.

Psalms 15:1-5 . . . Who may worship in your sanctuary, Lord? Who may enter your presence on your holy hill? Those who lead blameless lives and do what is right, speaking the truth from sincere hearts. Those who refuse to slander others or harm their neighbors or speak evil of their friends. Those who despise persistent sinners, and honor the faithful followers of the Lord and keep their promises even when it hurts. Those who do not charge interest on the money they lend, and who refuse to accept bribes to testify against the innocent. Such people will stand firm forever.

Our integrity and our relationship with God are interdependent. We cannot have either without the other.

Proverbs 12:3 . . . Wickedness never brings stability; only the godly have deep roots.

Proverbs 10:9 . . . People with integrity have firm footing, but those who follow crooked paths will slip and fall.

Integrity provides stability. Each step away from a life of integrity is a step closer to a “slippery slope” that leads us into a sinful lifestyle.

Psalms 25:21 . . . May integrity and honesty protect me, for I put my hope in you.

Proverbs 11:3 . . . Good people are guided by their honesty; treacherous people are destroyed by their dishonesty.

Proverbs 13:6 . . . Godliness helps people all through life, while the evil are destroyed by their wickedness.

Isaiah 26:7 . . . For those who are righteous, the path is not steep and rough. You are a God of justice, and you smooth out the road ahead of them.

Integrity provides protection and guidance. Sin and the lack of integrity exposes us to all kinds of harm, especially the disintegration of our own character.

HOW IS INTEGRITY EVIDENCED IN OUR LIVES?

Daniel 6:4 . . . Then the other administrators and princes began searching for some fault in the way Daniel was handling his affairs,

*“May integrity and honesty protect me, for I put my hope in you.”
(Psalm 25:21)*

INTEGRITY IS BEING WHAT WE SAY WE ARE.

If ever we needed two powerful forces to preserve us along life’s way, we need integrity and honesty. The psalmist asks for these to protect him step-by-step. Honesty makes us learn God’s requirements and strive to fulfill them. Integrity-being what we say we are-keeps us from claiming to be honest while living as if we do not know God. Honesty says, “This is the Shepherd’s way,” and integrity says, “I will walk consistently in it.”

“Unless you are faithful in small matters, you won’t be faithful in large ones. If you cheat even a little, you won’t be honest with greater responsibilities. And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven?” (Luke 16:10-11)

ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT TESTS OF INTEGRITY IS WEALTH.

Our integrity often meets its match in money matters. God calls us to be honest even in small details we could easily rationalize away. Heaven’s riches are far more valuable than earthly wealth. But if we are not trustworthy with our money here (no matter how much or how little we have), we will be unfit to handle the vast riches of God’s kingdom. Don’t let your integrity slip in small matters, and it will not fail you in crucial decisions either.

WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF INTEGRITY?

Proverbs 12:22 . . . The Lord hates those who don’t keep their word, but he delights in those who do.

Proverbs 21:3 . . . The Lord is more pleased when we do what is just and right than when we give him sacrifices.

1 Chronicles 29:17 . . . I know, my God, that you examine our hearts and rejoice when you find integrity there. You know I have done all

“One day the apostles said to the Lord, “We need more faith; tell us how to get it.” (Luke 17:5)

EFFECTIVE FAITH DEPENDS ON GOD.

The disciples’ request was genuine; they wanted the faith necessary for radical forgiveness. But Jesus didn’t directly answer their question because the amount of faith is not as important as its genuineness. What is faith? It is total dependence on God and a willingness to do his will. Faith is not something we use to put on a show for others. It is complete and humble obedience to God’s will, readiness to do whatever he calls us to do. The amount of faith isn’t as important as the right kind of faith-faith in our all-powerful God.

EFFECTIVE FAITH IS MORE CONCERNED WITH ITS LIFE THAN ITS SIZE.

A mustard seed is small, but it is alive and growing. Like a tiny seed, a small amount of genuine faith in God will take root and grow. Almost invisible at first, it will begin to spread, first under the ground and then visibly. Although each change will be gradual and imperceptible, soon this faith will have produced major results that will uproot and destroy competing loyalties. We don’t need more faith; a tiny seed of faith is enough, if it is alive and growing.

“A righteous person will live by faith. But I will have no pleasure in anyone who turns away. (Hebrews 10:38)

EFFECTIVE FAITH GROWS UNDER PRESSURE.

Hebrews encourages believers to persevere in their Christian faith and conduct when facing persecution and pressure. We don’t usually think of suffering as good for us, but it can build our character and our patience. During times of great stress, we may feel God’s presence more clearly and find help from Christians we never thought would care. Knowing that Jesus is with us in our suffering and that he will return one day to put an end to all pain helps us grow in our faith and our relationship with him (see Romans 5:3-5).

EFFECTIVE FAITH BECOMES STRONGER THROUGH ENDURANCE.

The writer encourages his readers not to abandon their faith in times of persecution, but to show by their endurance that their faith is real. Faith means resting in what Christ has done for us in the past, but it also means hoping for what he will do for us in the future (see Romans 8:12-25; Galatians 3:10-13).

“What is faith? It is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. It is the evidence of things we cannot yet see.” (Hebrews 11:1)

EFFECTIVE FAITH IS HOPEFUL ANTICIPATION.

Do you remember how you felt when you were very young and your birthday approached? You were excited and anxious. You knew you would certainly receive gifts and other special treats. But some things would be a surprise. Birthdays combine assurance and anticipation, and so does faith! Faith is the conviction based on past experience that God’s new and fresh surprises will surely be ours.

INTEGRITY Psalm 25:1-22

WHAT IS INTEGRITY?

Micah 6:8 . . . No, O people, the Lord has already told you what is good, and this is what he requires: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

Job 2:3 . . . Then the Lord asked Satan, “Have you noticed my servant Job? He is the finest man in all the earth—a man of complete integrity. He fears God and will have nothing to do with evil. And he has maintained his integrity, even though you persuaded me to harm him without cause.”

Integrity is belief, character and conduct in harmony with God.

“I’m asking you to give me the hill country that the LORD promised me. You will remember that as scouts we found the Anakites living there in great, walled cities. But if the LORD is with me, I will drive them out of the land, just as the LORD said.” (Joshua 14:12)

INTEGRITY IS A LONG-TERM CHARACTER TRAIT.

Caleb was faithful from the start. As one of the original spies sent into the Promised Land (Numbers 13:30-33), he saw great cities and giants, yet he knew God would help the people conquer the land. Because of his faith, God promised him a personal inheritance of land (Numbers 14:24; Deuteronomy 1:34-36). Here, forty-five years later, the land was given to him. His faith was still unwavering. The integrity with which he had boldly contradicted the cowardly advice of the ten spies years before was as strong as ever. Although his inherited land still had giants, Caleb knew the Lord would help him conquer them. Like Caleb, we must be faithful to God, not only at the start of our walk with him, but through our entire lives. We must never allow ourselves to rest on our past accomplishments or reputations.

Proverbs 23:21 . . . They are on their way to poverty. Too much sleep clothes a person with rags.

2 Corinthians 8:12-14 . . . If you are really eager to give, it isn't important how much you are able to give. God wants you to give what you have, not what you don't have. Of course, I don't mean you should give so much that you suffer from having too little. I only mean that there should be some equality. Right now you have plenty and can help them. Then at some other time they can share with you when you need it. In this way, everyone's needs will be met.

Excess, a lack of moderation, often leads to imbalance . Too much of anything means there is not enough of something else, thus an imbalance.

Proverbs 10:21 . . . The godly give good advice, but fools are destroyed by their lack of common sense.

Common sense can often help us lead balanced lives.

PROMISES FROM GOD:

Titus 2:12 . . . We are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with self-control, right conduct, and devotion to God.

Psalms 119:5-7 . . . Oh, that my actions would consistently reflect your principles! Then I will not be disgraced when I compare my life with your commands. When I learn your righteous laws, I will thank you by living as I should.

James 1:25 . . . If you keep looking steadily into God's perfect law—the law that sets you free—and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

HOPE (Heb. 10:19-25)

HOPE, GOD'S WORD ON

For a prisoner on death row, a pardon offers hope of freedom. For the spiritual prisoner on death row because of the consequences of sin, God offers ultimate hope by forgiving our sins so that we can be with him in heaven forever. When life seems impossible, God brings eternal hope. Hope is essential to our perseverance, our getting through the tough times. Without hope we give up. Hope requires one thing, though—a trust in the one who brings real hope

“Despite all this, I will not utterly reject or despise them while they are in exile in the land of their enemies. I will not cancel my covenant with them by wiping them out. I, the LORD, am their God.”

(Leviticus 26:44)

A CHRISTIAN'S HOPE IS BASED ON GOD'S FAITHFULNESS.

These verses show what God meant when he said he is slow to anger (Exodus 34:6). Even if the Israelites chose to disobey and were scattered among their enemies, God would still give them the opportunity to repent and return to him. His purpose was not to destroy them, but to help them grow. Our day-to-day experiences and hardships are sometimes overwhelming; unless we can see that God's purpose is to bring about continual growth in us, we may despair. The hope we need is well expressed in Jeremiah 29:11-12: ” ’For I know the plans I have for you,’ says the Lord. ’They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen.’ ” Retaining hope while we suffer shows we understand God's merciful ways of relating to his people.

“Jesus ignored their comments and said to Jairus, “Don't be afraid. Just trust me.” (Mark 5:36)

HOPE COMES FROM TRUSTING CHRIST.

Jairus's crisis made him feel confused, afraid, and without hope. Jesus' words to Jairus in the midst of crisis speak to us as well: “Don't

be afraid. Just trust me.” In Jesus’ mind, there was both hope and promise. The next time you feel hopeless and afraid, look at your problem from Jesus’ point of view. He is the source of all hope and promise.

“Since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of highest privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God’s glory.”

(Romans 5:1-2)

HOPE COMES FROM REMEMBERING ALL THAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US.

As Paul states clearly in 1 Corinthians 13:13, faith, hope, and love are at the heart of the Christian life. Our relationship with God begins with faith, which helps us realize that we are delivered from our past by Christ’s death. Hope grows as we learn all that God has in mind for us; it gives us the promise of the future. And God’s love fills our life and gives us the ability to reach out to others.

HOPE GROWS AS WE DEPEND ON GOD IN THE DIFFICULT TIMES.

For first-century Christians, suffering was the rule rather than the exception. Paul tells us that in the future we will become, but until then we must overcome. This means we will experience difficulties that help us grow. We rejoice in suffering not because we like pain or deny its tragedy, but because we know God is using life’s difficulties and Satan’s attacks to build our character. The problems that we run into will develop our perseverance-which in turn will strengthen our character, deepen our trust in God, and give us greater confidence about the future. You probably find your patience tested in some way every day. Thank God for those opportunities to grow, and deal with them in his strength.

(see also James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7).

Luke 3:14 . . . “What should we do?” asked some soldiers. John replied, “Don’t extort money. . . . And be content with your pay.”
1 Timothy 6:6-9 . . . True religion with contentment is great wealth. . . . So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content. But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction.

Hebrews 13:5 . . . Be satisfied with what you have.

Often a lack of moderation brings imbalance into our lives when we become discontented with what we have. Contentment gives us freedom.

1 Corinthians 9:26-27 . . . I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I am not like a boxer who misses his punches. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should.

When we fully understand what work God has given us to do, we can focus on that and remove distractions that throw our lives out of balance.

WHAT CAUSES OUR LIVES TO BECOME UNBALANCED WHEN WE DON’T SHOW MODERATION?

James 3:14-16 . . . If you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your hearts, don’t brag about being wise. That is the worst kind of lie. For jealousy and selfishness are not God’s kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and motivated by the Devil. For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and every kind of evil.

Our lives become unbalanced when we are dwelling on the earthly and unspiritual as opposed to depending on God’s wisdom.

1 Timothy 6:6-9 . . . People who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction.

Hebrews 13:5 . . . Stay away from the love of money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, “I will never fail you. I will never forsake you.”

Feelings of dissatisfaction often result in an unbalanced life as we focus selfishly on materialism instead of God. Materialism feeds on itself, wanting ever more. Godliness feeds on God, finding contentment in him.

MODERATION IN PURSUING EXCELLENCE.

As a young leader in a church that had a lot of problems, Timothy may have felt intimidated. But the elders and prophets encouraged him and charged him to use his spiritual gift responsibly. Highly skilled and talented athletes lose their abilities if their muscles aren't toned by constant use and we will lose our spiritual gifts if we don't put them to work. Our talents are improved by exercise, but failing to use them by showing moderation within our Christian lives, causes them to waste away from lack of practice and nourishment. What gifts and abilities has God given you? Use them regularly in serving God and others. (See Romans 12:1-8 and 2 Timothy 1:6-8 for more on using the abilities God has given us.)

MODERATION IN SELF-EVALUATION.

We know the importance of watching our lives closely. We must be on constant guard against falling into sin that can so easily destroy us. Yet we must watch what we believe just as closely. Wrong beliefs can quickly lead us into sin and heresy. We should be on guard against those who would persuade us that how we live is more important than what we believe. We should persevere in both.

HOW DO I LIVE A BALANCED LIFE OF MODERATION IN CHRIST?

Romans 13:14 . . . Let the Lord Jesus Christ take control of you, and don't think of ways to indulge your evil desires.

Romans 8:6 . . . If your sinful nature controls your mind, there is death. But if the Holy Spirit controls your mind, there is life and peace.

When we let Christ have control of our lives, he will help us to bring everything into balance, giving us life and peace.

Psalms 37:34 . . . Don't be impatient for the Lord to act! Travel steadily along his path.

Trusting God in everything helps us to keep our lives in balance.

Proverbs 12:3 . . . Wickedness never brings stability; only the godly have deep roots.

Living a godly life in harmony with God's will gives us the stability we long for.

"Brothers and sisters, I want you to know what will happen to the Christians who have died so you will not be full of sorrow like people who have no hope. (1 Thessalonians 4:13)

HOPE GROWS AS WE REMEMBER THE PROMISE OF THE RESURRECTION.

Because Jesus Christ came back to life, so will all believers. All Christians, including those living when Christ returns, will live with Christ forever. Therefore, we need not despair when loved ones die or world events take a tragic turn. God will turn our tragedies to triumphs, our poverty to riches, our pain to glory, and our defeat to victory. All believers throughout history will stand reunited in God's very presence, safe and secure. As Paul comforted the Thessalonians with the promise of the Resurrection, so we should comfort and reassure each other with this great hope.

PROMISES FROM GOD:

Psalms 71:5 . . . O Lord, you alone are my hope . . . Who but God controls the future? Who but God has a home for us that is eternal? Who but God forgives our sins? Who but God can give us a life that lasts forever? No wonder he is our hope!

Psalms 130:7 . . . Hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is unfailing love and an overflowing supply of salvation.

Job 11:18 . . . You will have courage because you will have hope.

Isaiah 25:8 . . . He will swallow up death forever!

God will conquer death.

Jeremiah 29:11 . . . "I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."

Knowing God has a plan for your life brings hope for the future.

Matthew 1:21 . . . "She will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

God saves us from the consequences of sin.

LOVE (1John 3:10-24)

A healthy definition of love is crucial to understanding the central message of the Bible. According to the Bible, love is not confined to sexuality, nor is it primarily a feeling at all. The Bible teaches that love is a commitment. As a commitment, love is not dependent on good feelings, but rather on a consistent and courageous decision to extend oneself for the well-being of another. That commitment then produces good feelings, not the other way around. Jesus became the perfect demonstration of God's unconditional love for us by laying down his life for our benefit.

Love is a very important idea for Christians. Jesus taught that the greatest commandments were to love God and to love our neighbors. He said that those two commandments summed up all the commandments that God gave to Moses. In the same way, people like Paul and John wrote how love should be a major part of every Christian's life. Because it is such an important idea to understand, it is helpful to see what the Bible tells us about love.

"Heaven will be happier over one lost sinner who returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!" (Luke 15:7)

GOD'S LOVE IS FORGIVING.

We may be able to understand a God who would forgive sinners who come to him for mercy. But a God who tenderly searches for sinners and then joyfully forgives them must possess an extraordinary love! This is the kind of love that prompted Jesus to come to earth to search for lost people and save them. This is the kind of extraordinary love that God has for you. If you feel far from God, don't despair. He is searching for you.

"I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels can't, and the demons can't. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away. Whether we are high above

MODERATION Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

"Jesus grew both in height and in wisdom, and he was loved by God and by all who knew him." (Luke 2:52)

JESUS IS OUR MODEL.

The second chapter of Luke shows us that although Jesus was unique, he had a normal childhood and adolescence. In terms of development, he went through the same progression we do. He grew physically and mentally, he related to other people, and he was loved by God. A full human life is not unbalanced, but one that shows moderation in all that we do. It was important to Jesus-and it should be important to all believers-to develop fully and harmoniously in each of these key areas: physical, mental, social, and spiritual. Showing moderation in life, helps us develop fully in these areas of life.

"Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you teach, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity." (1 Timothy 4:12)

MODERATION IN PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL AREAS.

Are you in shape both physically and spiritually? In our society, much emphasis is placed on physical fitness, but spiritual health (godliness) is even more important. Our physical bodies are susceptible to disease and injury, but faith can sustain us through these tragedies. To train for godliness, we must develop our faith by using our God-given abilities in the service of the church (see 4:14-16). Are you developing your spiritual muscles?

BALANCE IN HOW OUR LIVES AFFECT OTHERS.

Timothy was a young pastor. It would be easy for older Christians to look down on him because of his youth. He had to earn the respect of his elders by setting an example in his speech, life, love, faith, and purity. Regardless of your age, God can use you. Whether you are young or old, don't think of your age as a handicap. Live so others can see Christ in you.

ARE THERE CONSEQUENCES TO A LACK OF COURAGE?

Luke 23:13-25 . . . Their voices prevailed. So Pilate sentenced Jesus to die as they demanded.

Standing up for what is right can get you in trouble from corrupt people. Failing to stand up for what is right can get you in trouble with God.

PROMISES FROM GOD:

Joshua 1:9 . . . I command you-be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

Job 11:18 . . . You will have courage because you will have hope.

the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39)

GOD’S LOVE IS BEYOND MEASURE.

These words were written to a church that would soon undergo terrible persecution. In just a few years, Paul’s hypothetical situations would turn into painful realities. This passage reaffirms God’s profound love for his people. No matter what happens to us, no matter where we are, we can never be lost to his love. Suffering should not drive us away from God; it should help us to identify with him further and allow his love to reach us and heal us.

GOD’S LOVE IS ETERNAL.

These verses contain one of the most comforting promises in all Scripture. Believers have always had to face hardships in many forms: persecution, illness, imprisonment, even death. These could cause them to fear that they have been abandoned by Christ. But Paul exclaims that it is impossible to be separated from Christ. His death for us is proof of his unconquerable love. Nothing can stop Christ’s constant presence with us. God tells us how great his love is so that we will feel totally secure in him. If we believe these overwhelming assurances, we will not be afraid.

*“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”
(John 3:16)*

GOD’S LOVE IS SACRIFICIAL.

The entire gospel comes to a focus in this verse. God’s love is not static or self-centered; it reaches out and draws others in. Here God sets the pattern of true love, the basis for all love relationships-when you love someone dearly, you are willing to pay dearly for that person’s responsive love. God paid dearly with the life of his Son, the highest price he could pay. Jesus accepted our punishment, paid the price for our sins, and then offered us the new life that he had bought for us. When we share the gospel with others, our love must be like Jesus’. We must be willing to give up

our own comfort and security so that others might join us in receiving God's love.

WHAT ARE THE BIBLICAL GUIDELINES FOR HUMAN LOVE?

“Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

LOVE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN SPIRITUAL GIFTS.

In chapter 12 Paul gave evidence of the Corinthians' lack of love in the utilization of spiritual gifts; chapter 13 defines real love; and chapter 14 shows how love works. Love is more important than all the spiritual gifts exercised in the church body. Great faith, acts of dedication or sacrifice, and miracle-working power produce very little without love. Love makes our actions and gifts useful. Although people have different gifts, love is available to everyone.

LOVE BENEFITS OTHERS.

Our society confuses love and lust. Unlike lust, God's kind of love is directed outward toward others, not inward toward ourselves. It is utterly unselfish. This kind of love goes against our natural inclinations. It is possible to practice this love only if God helps us set aside our own desires and instincts, so that we can give love while expecting nothing in return. Thus the more we become like Christ, the more love we will show to others.

“Dear friends, I am not writing a new commandment, for it is an old one you have always had, right from the beginning. This commandment-to love one another-is the same message you heard before. Yet it is also new. This commandment is true in Christ and is true among you, because the darkness is disappearing and the true light is already shining. (1 John 2:7-8)

HOW DO I FIND THE COURAGE TO FACE CHANGE?

Genesis 46:3-4 . . . Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will see to it that you become a great nation there.

Change may be part of God's plan for you. If so, what you are headed into will give you joy and satisfaction beyond your expectations.

Exodus 4:13 . . . Moses again pleaded, “Lord, please! Send someone else.”

To experience fear is normal. To be paralyzed by fear, however, can be an indication that you doubt God's ability to care for you in the face of change.

2 Samuel 4:1 . . . When Ishbosheth heard about Abner's death at Hebron, he lost all courage, and his people were paralyzed with fear.

If you take all of your courage from another person, you will eventually be left with nothing when that person is gone. If you trust in God, you will have the strength to go on even when circumstances collapse around you.

HOW DO I FIND THE COURAGE TO ADMIT MY MISTAKES?

2 Samuel 12:13 . . . Then David confessed to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” Nathan replied, “Yes, but the Lord has forgiven you.”

To admit our mistakes and sins is to open the door to forgiveness and restoration of relationships.

HOW DO I FIND THE COURAGE TO STAND FIRM IN MY CONVICTIONS?

Esther 3:2 . . . Mordecai refused to bow down or show [Haman] respect.

Courage to stand firm in our convictions comes from understanding where our true loyalties lie. If you are more concerned about what others think than about what God thinks, you will find yourself lacking courage and wavering in your faith.

“The eternal God is your refuge, and his everlasting arms are under you. He thrusts out the enemy before you; it is he who cries, “Destroy them!” (Deuteronomy 33:27)

COURAGE GROWS AS WE TRUST GOD.

Moses’ song declares that God is our refuge, our only true security. How often we entrust our lives to other things—perhaps money, career, a noble cause, or a lifelong dream. But our only true refuge is the eternal God, who always holds out his arms to catch us when the shaky supports that we trust collapse and we fall. No storm can destroy us when we take refuge in him. Those without God, however, must forever be cautious. One mistake may wipe them out. Living for God in this world may look like risky business. But it is the godless who are on shaky ground. Because God is our refuge, we can dare to be bold.

“I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

COURAGE GROWS FROM THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST.

Jesus summed up all he had told them this night, tying together themes from 14:27-29; 16:1-4; and 16:9-11. With these words he told his disciples to take courage. In spite of the inevitable struggles they would face, they would not be alone. Jesus does not abandon us to our struggles either. If we remember that the ultimate victory has already been won, we can claim the peace of Christ in the most troublesome times.

WHEN GOD IS WITH US, WE DON’T EVEN NEED TO BE AFRAID OF DEATH.

Luke 12:4 . . . Dear friends, don’t be afraid of those who want to kill you. They can only kill the body; they cannot do any more to you.

LOVE IS A COMMAND.

The commandment to love others is both old and new. It is old because it comes from the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:18). It is new because Jesus interpreted it in a radically new way (John 13:34-35). In the Christian church, love is not only expressed by showing respect; it is also expressed through self-sacrifice and servanthood (John 15:13). In fact, it can be defined as “selfless giving,” reaching beyond friends to enemies and persecutors (Matthew 5:43-48). Love should be the unifying force and the identifying mark of the Christian community. Love is the key to walking in the light, because we cannot grow spiritually while we hate others. Our growing relationship with God will result in growing relationships with others.

LOVE IS A CHOICE.

Does this mean that if you dislike someone you aren’t a Christian? These verses are not talking about disliking a disagreeable Christian brother or sister. There will always be people we will not like as well as others. John’s words focus on the attitude that causes us to ignore or despise others, to treat them as irritants, competitors, or enemies. Christian love is not a feeling, but a choice. We can choose to be concerned with people’s well-being and treat them with respect, whether or not we feel affection toward them. If we choose to love others, God will help us express our love.

WHAT ARE SOME SPECIAL THINGS THAT COME FROM A LOVING RELATIONSHIP?

Proverbs 10:12 . . . Hatred stirs up quarrels, but love covers all offenses.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 . . . Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

The gifts that come from love are many. Here are a few: (1) forgiveness, (2) patience, (3) kindness, (4) love for truth, (5) love for justice, (6) love for the best in a person, (7) loyalty at any cost, (8) belief in a

person no matter what. Love does not allow for (1) jealousy, (2) envy, (3) pride, (4) a haughty spirit, (5) selfishness, (6) rudeness, (7) a demand for one's own way, (8) irritability, (9) grudges.

MUST I LOVE OTHER PEOPLE? WHAT IF I DON'T WANT TO?

John 13:34 . . . I now am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other.

1 John 2:9 . . . Anyone who says, "I am in the light" but rejects another Christian is still in darkness.

John 13:35 . . . Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.

1 Peter 4:8 . . . Love covers a multitude of sins.

1 John 4:12 . . . If we love each other, God lives in us, and his love has been brought to full expression through us.

Being a Christian comes with certain expectations, and one of them is that we will love others. Our Christian conduct is proof as to whether we love each other, and loving each other is proof that we belong to Christ.

16) and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3:16-18) are some of the people who took a bold stand for what was right. Whole nations can be caught up in immorality (racial hatred, slavery, prison cruelty); thus following the majority or the authority is not always right. Whenever we are ordered to disobey God's Word, "we must obey God rather than human authority" (Acts 5:29).

"Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph. He was a member of the Jewish high council, but he had not agreed with the decision and actions of the other religious leaders. He was from the town of Arimathea in Judea, and he had been waiting for the Kingdom of God to come." (Luke 23:50-51)

COURAGEOUS PEOPLE RISK THEIR REPUTATIONS TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT.

Joseph of Arimathea was a wealthy and honored member of the Jewish Council. He was also a secret disciple of Jesus (John 19:38). The disciples who had publicly followed Jesus fled, but Joseph boldly took a stand that could cost him dearly. He cared enough about Jesus to ask for his body so he could give it a proper burial.

"After this prayer, the building where they were meeting shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. And they preached God's message with boldness." (Acts 4:31)

COURAGEOUS PEOPLE ARE BOLD IN REPRESENTING CHRIST.

Boldness is not reckless impulsiveness. Boldness requires courage to press through our fears and do what we know is right. How can we be more bold? Like the disciples, we need to pray with others for that courage. To gain boldness, you can (1) pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to give you courage, (2) look for opportunities in your family and neighborhood to talk about Christ, (3) realize that rejection, social discomfort, and embarrassment are not persecution, and (4) start where you are by being bolder in small ways.

COURAGE Daniel 3

Courage is the ability to act on what we know is right and good, to dare to do what we should or must. Fear paralyzes; courage is what helps us move ahead. Courage does not conquer fear, it simply renders fear ineffective. It gives us a confident assurance that we can succeed. Christians recognize that they have an extra resource in God's promised help in time of need. This should bring about a boldness to face any situation that comes our way. It should be noted that sometimes the courageous thing to do is run, if that is what will bring about the greatest good. The Bible speaks of courage to stand firm against evil, to remain strong in our faith, to resist temptation, to do the right thing. The more we learn to rely on God, the more courageous we will become.

"Because the midwives feared God, they refused to obey the king and allowed the boys to live, too. (Exodus 1:17)

COURAGEOUS PEOPLE RISK THEIR LIVES TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT.

Shiphrah and Puah may have been supervisors over the midwives, or else these two were given special mention. Hebrew midwives helped women give birth and cared for the baby until the mother was stronger. When Pharaoh ordered the midwives to kill the Hebrew baby boys, he was asking the wrong group of people. Midwives were committed to helping babies be born, not to killing them. These women showed great courage and love for God by risking their lives to disobey Pharaoh's command. (Note: A delivery stool was the stool upon which a woman crouched when delivering her baby.)

Against Pharaoh's orders, the midwives spared the Hebrew babies. Their faith in God gave them the courage to take a stand for what they knew was right. In this situation, disobeying the authority was proper. God does not expect us to obey those in authority when they ask us to disobey him or his Word. The Bible is filled with examples of those who were willing to sacrifice their very lives in order to obey God or save others. Esther and Mordecai (Esther 3:2; 4:13-

WISDOM 1Cor. 1:18-31

Solving a complex problem in trigonometry and writing a computer program that will guide a nuclear submarine both require great intelligence. But such intelligence does not guarantee a fulfilling, balanced, and productive life. Success in relationships, raising children, and spiritual maturity are dependent not on intellect, but rather on wisdom. The Bible, which devotes the whole book of Proverbs to the subject, teaches that the wisdom to master life's challenges and to understand spiritual truth is found only in God.

WHAT IS WISDOM, AND HOW DO WE BECOME WISE?

Give me an understanding mind so that I can govern your people well and know the difference between right and wrong. For who by himself is able to govern this great nation of yours? (1 Kings 3:9)

WISDOM BEGINS WHEN WE ASK GOD TO BE OUR SUPPLY.

When given a chance to have anything in the world, Solomon asked for wisdom-"an understanding mind"-in order to lead well and to make right decisions. We can ask God for this same wisdom (James 1:5). Notice that Solomon asked for discernment to carry out his job; he did not ask God to do the job for him. We should not ask God to do for us what he wants to do through us. Instead we should ask God to give us the wisdom to know what to do and the courage to follow through on it.

WISDOM IS THINKING AND LIVING AS GOD DESIGNED US TO LIVE.

Solomon asked for wisdom, not wealth, but God gave him riches and long life as well. While God does not promise riches to those who follow him, he gives us what we need if we put his kingdom, his interests, and his principles first (Matthew 6:31-33). Setting your heart on riches will only leave you dissatisfied because even if you get the

riches you crave, you will still want something more. But if you put God and his work first, he will satisfy your deepest needs.

WISDOM IS THE ABILITY TO APPLY KNOWLEDGE TO EVERYDAY LIFE.

Solomon received wisdom from God, but it was up to Solomon to apply that wisdom to all areas of his life. Solomon was obviously wise in governing the nation, but he was foolish in running his household. Wisdom is both the ability to discern what is best and the strength of character to act upon that knowledge. While Solomon remained wise all his life, he did not always act upon his wisdom (11:6). Solomon's settlement of the dispute described in 1 Kings 3:16-28 was a classic example of his wisdom. This wise ruling was verification that God had answered Solomon's prayer and given him a discerning heart. Discernment is the capacity to recognize truth and issues deeper than the surface appearance. We have God's wisdom available to us as we pray and request it. But, like Solomon, we must put it into action.

“Fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge. Only fools despise wisdom and discipline. (Proverbs 1:7)

TRUST IN GOD-HE WILL MAKE YOU TRULY WISE.

In this age of information, knowledge is plentiful, but wisdom is scarce. Wisdom means far more than simply knowing a lot. It is a basic attitude that affects every aspect of life. The foundation of knowledge is to fear the Lord-to honor and respect God, to live in awe of his power, and to obey his Word. Faith in God should be the controlling principle for your understanding of the world, your attitudes, and your actions.

“How wonderful to be wise, to be able to analyze and interpret things. Wisdom lights up a person's face, softening its hardness. (Ecclesiastes 8:1)

“The law was given through Moses; God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ.” (John 1:17)

GOD'S JUSTICE AND MERCY WORK TOGETHER.

Law and grace are both aspects of God's nature that he uses in dealing with us. Moses emphasized God's law and justice, while Jesus Christ came to highlight God's mercy, love, and forgiveness. Moses could only be the giver of the law, while Christ came to fulfill the law (Matthew 5:17). The nature and will of God were revealed in the law; now the nature and will of God are revealed in Jesus Christ. Rather than coming through cold stone tablets, God's revelation now comes through a person's life. As we get to know Christ better, our understanding of God will increase.

WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN JUSTICE IS ABUSED?

Psalm 82:3 . . . Uphold the rights of the oppressed and the destitute. Speak out against injustice.

Psalm 58:6-7 . . . Break off their fangs, O God!

Pray that God would intervene.

Isaiah 56:1 . . . “Be just and fair to all,” says the Lord. “Do what is right and good.”

Romans 13:7 . . . Give to everyone what you owe them.

Continue to do what is right. Don't become unjust yourself.

Proverbs 20:22 . . . Don't say, “I will get even for this wrong.” Wait for the Lord to handle the matter.

Don't repay evil with evil. Don't seek revenge.

God's mind, but they may change ours just as Abraham's prayer changed his. Prayer helps us better understand the mind of God.

"The leaders and the princes will be the first to feel the LORD's judgment. "You have ruined Israel, which is my vineyard. You have taken advantage of the poor, filling your barns with grain extorted from helpless people." (Isaiah 3:14)

GOD GUARANTEES JUSTICE.

In the middle of this gloomy message, God gives hope—eventually the righteous will receive God's reward and the wicked will receive their punishment. It is disheartening to see the wicked prosper while we struggle to obey God and follow his plan. Yet we keep holding on to God's truth and take heart! God will bring about justice in the end, and he will reward those who have been faithful.

GOD DESPISES INJUSTICE.

The elders and leaders were responsible to help people, but instead they stole from the poor. Because they were unjust, Isaiah said the leaders would be the first to receive God's judgment. Leaders will be held accountable for how they lead. If you are in a position of leadership, you must lead according to God's just commands. Corruption will bring God's wrath, especially if others follow your example.

GOD IS JUST.

Why is justice so important in the Bible? (1) Justice is part of God's nature; it is the way he runs the universe. (2) It is a natural desire in every person. Even as sinners, we all want justice for ourselves. (3) When government and church leaders are unjust, the poor and powerless suffer. Thus they are hindered from worshiping God. (4) God holds the poor in high regard. They are the ones most likely to turn to him for help and comfort. Injustice, then, attacks God's children. When we do nothing to help the oppressed, we are in fact joining with the oppressor. Because we follow a just God, we must uphold justice.

WISDOM IS THE ABILITY TO SEE LIFE FROM GOD'S PERSPECTIVE AND THEN TO KNOW THE BEST COURSE OF ACTION TO TAKE.

Most people would agree that wisdom is a valuable asset, but how can we acquire it? Proverbs 9:10 teaches that the reverence and fear of the Lord (respect and honor) are basic to all wisdom. Wisdom comes from knowing and trusting God; it is not merely the way to find God. Knowing God will lead to understanding and then to sharing this knowledge with others.

"There the child grew up healthy and strong. He was filled with wisdom beyond his years, and God placed his special favor upon him. (Luke 2:40)

WE BECOME WISER AS WE BECOME MORE LIKE CHRIST.

Jesus was filled with wisdom, which is not surprising because he stayed in close contact with his heavenly Father. James 1:5 says God gives wisdom generously to all who ask. Even our children need to be encouraged to seek and develop wisdom. Like Jesus, we can grow in wisdom by walking with God.

"If you need wisdom—if you want to know what God wants you to do—ask him, and he will gladly tell you. He will not resent your asking."
(James 1:5)

WE CAN ASK FOR GOD'S WISDOM TO GUIDE OUR CHOICES.

By wisdom, James is talking not only about knowledge, but about the ability to make wise decisions in difficult circumstances. Whenever we need wisdom, we can pray to God, and he will generously supply what we need. Christians don't have to grope around in the dark, hoping to stumble upon answers.

WISDOM MEANS PRACTICAL DISCERNMENT.

It begins with respect for God, leads to right living, and results in increased ability to tell right from wrong. God is willing to give us

JUSTICE Isaiah 61

this wisdom, but we will be unable to receive it if our goals are self-centered instead of God-centered. To learn God's will, we need to read his Word and ask him to show us how to obey it. Then we must do what he tells us.

PROMISES FROM GOD:

Proverbs 1:23 . . . Come here and listen to me! I'll pour out the spirit of wisdom upon you and make you wise.

God offers wisdom to all who desire it.

Proverbs 3:5-6 . . . Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will direct your paths.

Proverbs 3:35 . . . The wise inherit honor, but fools are put to shame!

Proverbs 24:5 . . . A wise man is mightier than a strong man, and a man of knowledge is more powerful than a strong man.

James 1:5 . . . If you need wisdom-ask him, and he will gladly tell you.

God offers wisdom to all who desire it.

When others wrong us, we cry out for justice. When we wrong

God, we cry out for mercy. Fortunately, God is merciful. But if we don't accept his merciful gift of salvation, we are subject to God's justice, the punishment of eternal death and separation from God. Until God sets up his eternal kingdom, where perfect justice prevails, justice will continue to be needed here on earth-both God's justice to urge us toward his kingdom, and law and order to keep anarchy from ruling. But we would do well to learn some lessons about God's mercy as we mete out justice. While justice provides law and order, mercy provides hope and forgiveness-God's formula for restoration.

"Surely you wouldn't do such a thing, destroying the innocent with the guilty. Why, you would be treating the innocent and the guilty exactly the same! Surely you wouldn't do that! Should not the Judge of all the earth do what is right? (Genesis 18:25)

GOD PUNISHES SIN, BUT OFFERS MERCY TO THE SINFUL.

Why did God let Abraham question his justice and intercede for a wicked city? Abraham knew that God must punish sin, but he also knew from experience that God is merciful to sinners. God knew there were not ten righteous people in the city, but he was merciful enough to allow Abraham to intercede. He was also merciful enough to help Lot, Abraham's nephew, get out of Sodom before it was destroyed. God does not take pleasure in destroying the wicked, but he must punish sin. He is both just and merciful. We should be thankful that God's mercy extends to us.

GOD'S JUSTICE IS NOT CHANGED BY HIS MERCY.

Did Abraham change God's mind? Of course not. The more likely answer is that God changed Abraham's mind. Abraham knew that God is just and that he punishes sin, but he may have wondered about God's mercy. Abraham seemed to be probing God's mind to see how merciful he really was. He left his conversation with God convinced that God was both kind and fair. Our prayers won't change